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THE CURRENT STATUS OF CITIZENS' ADVISORY COMMITTEES WITH EMPHASIS ON THOSE FOR SCHOOL BUILDING NEEDS IN THE CENTRAL SCHOOLS OF NEW YORK STATE.

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STATISTICAL INFORMATION ABOUT CITIZENS' ADVISORY COMMITTEES, WITH EMPHASIS ON SCHOOL BUILDING NEEDS, IS PRESENTED. THE STATISTICS WERE OBTAINED FROM QUESTIONNAIRES SENT TO SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS IN CENTRAL NEW YORK STATE, DISCUSSING SCHOOL ENROLLMENT, DISTANCE FROM CLASS I CITIES, AND THE MAKE-UP OF ADVISORY COMMITTEES AND THEIR FUNCTIONS. (JH)

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SPECIAL REPORT

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THE CURRENT STATUS OF CITIZENS' ADVISORY COMMITTEES WITH EMPHASIS ON THOSE FOR SCHOOL BUILDING NEEDS IN THE CENTRAL SCHOOLS OF NEW YORK STATE

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

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by

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The Tenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States reads: "The powers not delegated to the United States by the constitution, nor prohibited by it to the states, are reserved to the states respectively, or to the people." Since the federal constitution makes no direct reference to education, power over it resides in the states.

To accomplish the ends expressed in state constitutions for public education, legislatures of the various states have set up local school districts.[1] The local school district has been the cornerstone of educational structure in the United States. The primary purpose of the local school district as originally conceived was to keep education as close to the people as possible. This of course encouraged both public participation and interest in the schools.

However, significant structural changes in our society since the turn of the century have militated against public participation in schools. The movement toward an urbanized society, the professionalization of school administrators, and the vast changes in both the physical and social settings of modern day schools have all resulted in widening the gap between the schools and the public. These factors have consequently discouraged public participation in education.

Research in educational administration gives some support to the theory that public participation is related to school quality. Moreover, the specific use of citizen advisory committees are associated with better schools. The improved quality of education through cooperative community-school relations has been emphasized as important in 24 of the 76 studies undertaken by the Institute of Administrative Research.[2]

Purpose of the Study. The literature reveals a moderate amount of research in the area of citizens' advisory committees. However, the writer noted that a paucity of research exists in a critical aspect of lay advisory committees, namely, committees whose function it is to analyze school plant needs. Consequently, the purposes of this study are:

1. To investigate the extent to which lay advisory committees which analyze school facility needs are utilized in central school districts in New York State.

2. To examine certain characteristics of school districts which either encourage or discourage the use of lay advisory committees.

3. To present data on the organization and structure of lay advisory committees which analyze school plant needs in the New York central schools.

Definition of Terms. In this study the terms "lay advisory committee" and "citizens' advisory committee" are used interchangeably. They refer to organizations that work with boards of education, school administrators, and

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[1] Hamilton, Robert R., and Reutter, E. Edmund, Jr. Legal Aspects of School Board Operation. New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1958, p. 2.

[2] Hill, O. E. Citizens At Work. New York: Associated Public School Systems, 1956, p. 3.

other citizens, on problems relating to schools.

THE CURRENT STATUS OF LAY ADVISORY COMMITTEES WHOSE FUNCTION IT IS TO ANALYZE SCHOOL PLANT NEEDS IN THE NEW YORK CENTRAL SCHOOLS

A two-page questionnaire was sent to the chief school administrator in each of the 504 central school districts in New York State. Replies were received from 306 of the districts, or 60% of the total. Of this number, 301 were tabulated in the study. The returns are representative of all of the counties in New York with the exception of the 5 counties of New York City.

Of the 301 school districts included in the study, 173 (57.5%) utilized lay advisory committees for various purposes. However, only 124 of the districts have used a lay advisory committee to analyze school plant needs. This represents 41.2% of the reporting districts. In his investigation of high wealth, suburban school districts in New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut, Stauffer found that 34 of the 53 communities studied (64.2%) used lay advisory committees to investigate building needs.[3]

Of the school districts that had completed construction of either a new building or an extension on to an existing facility, a significantly larger percentage utilized lay advisory committees to analyze school plant needs. Ninety-five of the 124 districts (76.6%) utilizing lay committees had a building program since 1960, whereas 84 of the 177 (47.5%) districts that did not use lay committees built in this period of time. It would appear that lay committees to analyze school plant needs are organized on a temporary basis as they are needed. The chances of their being used increases, of course, when districts are involved in a building program.

Annual Increase in Enrollment. An attempt was made to measure the effect of annual enrollment increases upon the use of lay committees. Sixty-six per cent of the districts not using lay committees had an annual enrollment increase between 0 to 3%. The data reveal that the percentage of districts using lay advisory committees to analyze school plant needs exceeds those not using lay committees as the annual percentage of enrollment increases. Consequently, districts having larger annual increases in enrollment are more likely to utilize lay advisory committees to analyze school facility needs.

Actual Pupil Enrollment. It was found that as the actual pupil enrollment of a school district increases, the chances that the district will utilize a lay advisory committee to analyze plant needs also increases. When the enrollment of a school district exceeds 2000 pupils, there is a great likelihood that a citizens' committee will be used. Only 1 of the 27 districts studied, having an enrollment of under 500 pupils used a lay committee to analyze plant needs. Almost 50% of districts not using lay committees have enrollments of fewer than 1000 pupils.

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[3]Stauffer, Harold M. A Method for Measuring Commitment to Citizen Advisory Committees. New York: Unpublished Ed.D Project, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1956, p. 39.

Distance From Class 1 Cities. The writer was interested in determining whether proximity of a school district to a large city is associated with the use of lay committees. The chief school administrators were asked to indicate the distance of their district from the closest Class I city, (New York, Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, Albany, and Yonkers).

It was found that districts within 75 miles of a Class I city were more likely to have a citizens committee. Almost 30% of all the districts having lay committees were within 25 miles of a Class I city. (See figure 1) A conclusion that can be drawn here is that public participation is greater in the more suburban communities. Also the use of advisory committees to study school plant needs decreases as the distance of a school district from a metropolitan area increases.

Responsibility For Analyzing School Plant Needs. It was surprising to see that in only 19% of the school districts having lay committees to analyze plant needs, the board of education assumed sole responsibility for this function. It was most common for this function to be held jointly by the board, the superintendent, and the lay committee.

Written Board Policy Regarding Advisory Committee. The board of education in 24.2% of the school districts had a written policy regarding the formation and organization of the lay advisory committee. Hull found that one-quarter of the districts he studied had a written policy regarding the formation of lay advisory committees.[4] O'Neal found that only 10% of the boards he studied had a written policy.[5]

Defining Functions of the Advisory Committee. It was found that 87.1% of the districts utilizing citizens advisory committees, defined the functions and purposes of the committee to committee members. In more than half of the cases, the board performed this function. However, in 46.3% of the cases, the board and lay committee jointly defined the committee functions. In no instance did the committee define its own functions.

Stauffer found that the board defined the committee functions in 35% of the districts he studied, and the committee determined their own functions in 17% of the districts.[6]

How Lay Advisory Committees Are Appointed. In studying school districts in the Metropolitan School Study Council, an associate organization of CSS, Stauffer found that the most popular method of selection of committee members was that of nomination by organizations other than the board with final appointment by the board.[7] It was found that in 73.9% of the central

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[4]Hull, J. H. Lay Advisory Committees to Boards of Education in The United States. Pasadena, California: California Association of School Administrators, 1949, p. 14.

[5]O'Neal, John F. "Citizens' Committees Can Help Schools." National Schools, 66:90, October, 1960.

[6]Stauffer, Harold M. A Method for Measuring Commitment to Citizen Advisory Committees. New York:Unpublished Ed.D Project, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1956, p. 30.

[7]Ibid., p. 24.

school districts, the lay advisory committee was appointed by the board.

Number of Members on Lay Advisory Committees. In the central school districts, it is most common to have between 10 to 15 committee members analyzing school plant needs. A minority of districts use fewer than 10 or more than 30 committee members. Over 70% of all central school districts use between 10 to 30 individuals on their lay committees. It is uncommon for a district to use fewer than 5 or greater than 50 committee members.

Teachers on Lay Advisory Committee. A large majority (61.9%) of the districts having lay committees subscribe to teacher representation on the committee. Stauffer found that teachers held membership on only 11% of the advisory committees in the schools of the Metropolitan School Study Council.[8] The trend toward granting teachers membership on lay committees in the central schools is a major step in democratizing these committees.

Length of Time Served By Committee Members. An overwhelming majority of the lay committees are organized on a temporary basis. In over 80% of the districts, committee members serve for less than one year. Members serve for over two years in only 6.5% of the districts.

Frequency of Committee Meetings. Hull found that 49% of the districts studied met either monthly or bi-monthly.[9] In the central schools, it is most common to call meetings as they are needed, and not at regular intervals. However, the lay committees in 36.7% of the districts do meet either on a monthly or bi-monthly basis.

Committee Chairman. In 75.4% of the districts, the chairman of the lay advisory committee is a committee member. In only 3.8% of the districts does the school superintendent serve as the lay committee chairman.

How School Plant Needs Are Established. There are a variety of ways in which school plant needs are established; however, the two most common methods are: a cooperative survey by professional and lay people (43.6%), and studies by school personnel (42.4%). In 63.1% of the districts, the lay advisory committee engages in long range planning of between 5 to 10 years.

Organization of Lay Advisory Committee. In 69.4% of the districts, the advisory committee was formally organized, that is, with a chairman, vice-chairman, and secretary, etc. Minutes were kept by only 75.6% of the committees. Hull found that minutes were kept by 91% of the committees studied.[10] Also clerical assistance is given in 67.7% of the school districts. In only 2 of the districts studied (1.6%), the committee members received payment for their

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[8]Stauffer, Harold M. A Method for Measuring Commitment to Citizen Advisory Committees. New York: Unpublished Ed.D Project, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1956, p. 29.

[9]Hull, op. cit., p. 14.

[10]Ibid., p. 14.

services. Also, in 80.3% of the districts, the lay committee represented a true cross-section of the community in terms of educational and occupational background.

Activities Engaged In By Lay Advisory Committees. Figure 2 indicates the extent to which the advisory committees studied engaged in various activities It is encouraging to note that more than half of all the lay committees studied engage in the following activities: school enrollment trends, studying educational program trends, community wide studies, studying population trends, and studying the structural conditions of the buildings.

Evaluation of Lay Advisory Committees. The chief school administrators were asked to rate the lay advisory committee on a five-point scale: superior, excellent, good, fair, and poor.

In 51.7% of the central school districts, the chief school administrator rated the advisory committee as being either superior or excellent. In his study of all school districts in New York State, O'Neal found that 70% of the lay committees were rated as either excellent or superior.[11] It is encouraging however that in the present study, only 5.6% of the lay committees were considered poor. (See Figure 3.)

SUMMARY AND SUGGESTIONS

Lay advisory committees can be used by school administrators as a means of improving the educational program in a community. School administrators will be able to develop stronger educational programs once they have learned to effectively utilize the human resources of the community.

Lay committees must be organized so that their functions are clearly defined. Also, a committee that is representative of the total community, and enjoys the full confidence of both the board of education and chief school administrator, can exert a strong positive influence on the educational program.

The importance of public participation as a means of improving public understanding is underscored in this study. The empirical evidence clearly reveals a positive relationship between public participation, public understanding and school quality. As administrators are able to increase public understanding, thereby raising the level of expectance, the demand by the public for better schools will follow.

The writer was encouraged to see how extensively lay committees are utilized in the central schools. It appears, however, that there is a need for an extension of public participation. Broadening the nominating function of community organizations, even in sparsely populated districts, seem desirable. Continuance of the high degree of teacher participation on lay advisory committees in the central schools would be especially constructive.

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[11] O'Neal, op. cit., p. 90.

An exceptionally attractive brochure was received from the Onteora Central School District. This report, produced by the citizens advisory committee, provided a comprehensive evaluation of the future building needs in the Onteora school system. The brochure is a typical example of how effectively a lay committee can perform. It clearly demonstrates that laymen can produce quality work if given the opportunity to serve the school districts.

Lay participation in the schools is an effective means to arriving at the desired end—quality education. The increased use of citizens by skillful school executives will significantly raise the quality of education.

FIGURE I

DISTANCES FROM CLASS I CITIES OF SCHOOL DISTRICTS USING AND NOT USING LAY ADVISORY COMMITTEES TO ANALYZE SCHOOL PLANT NEEDS

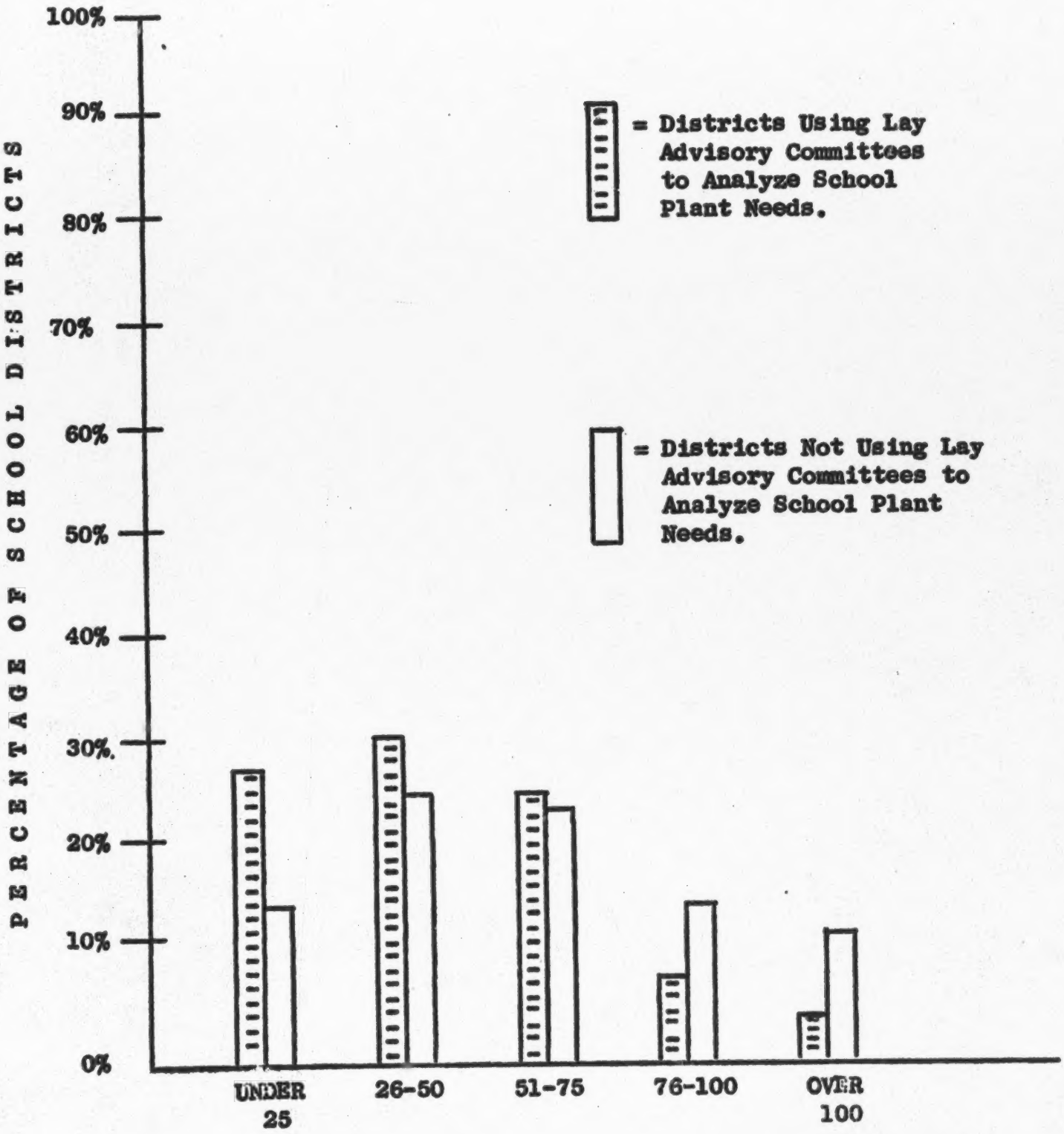


FIGURE 2

ACTIVITIES ENGAGED IN BY LAY ADVISORY COMMITTEES

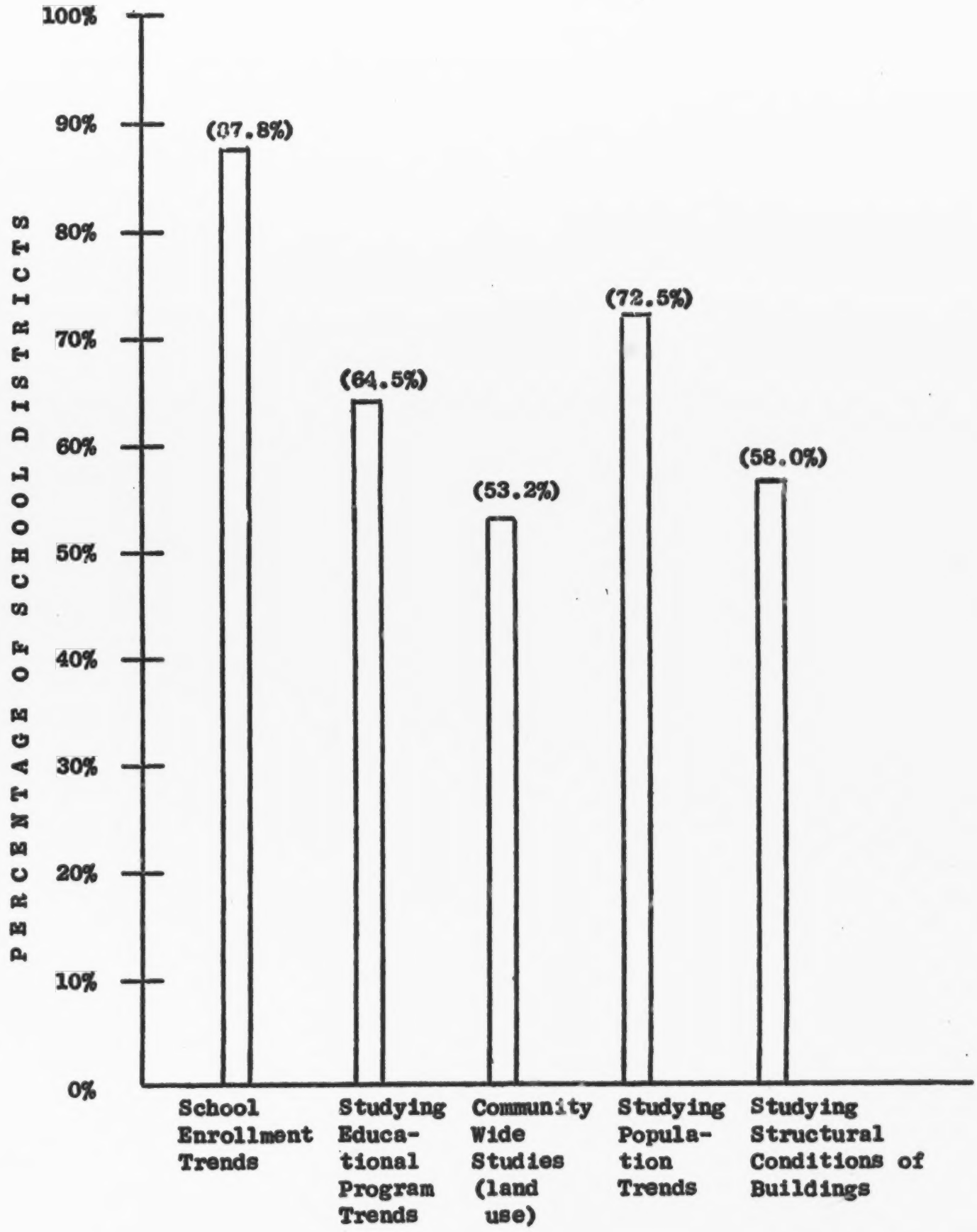
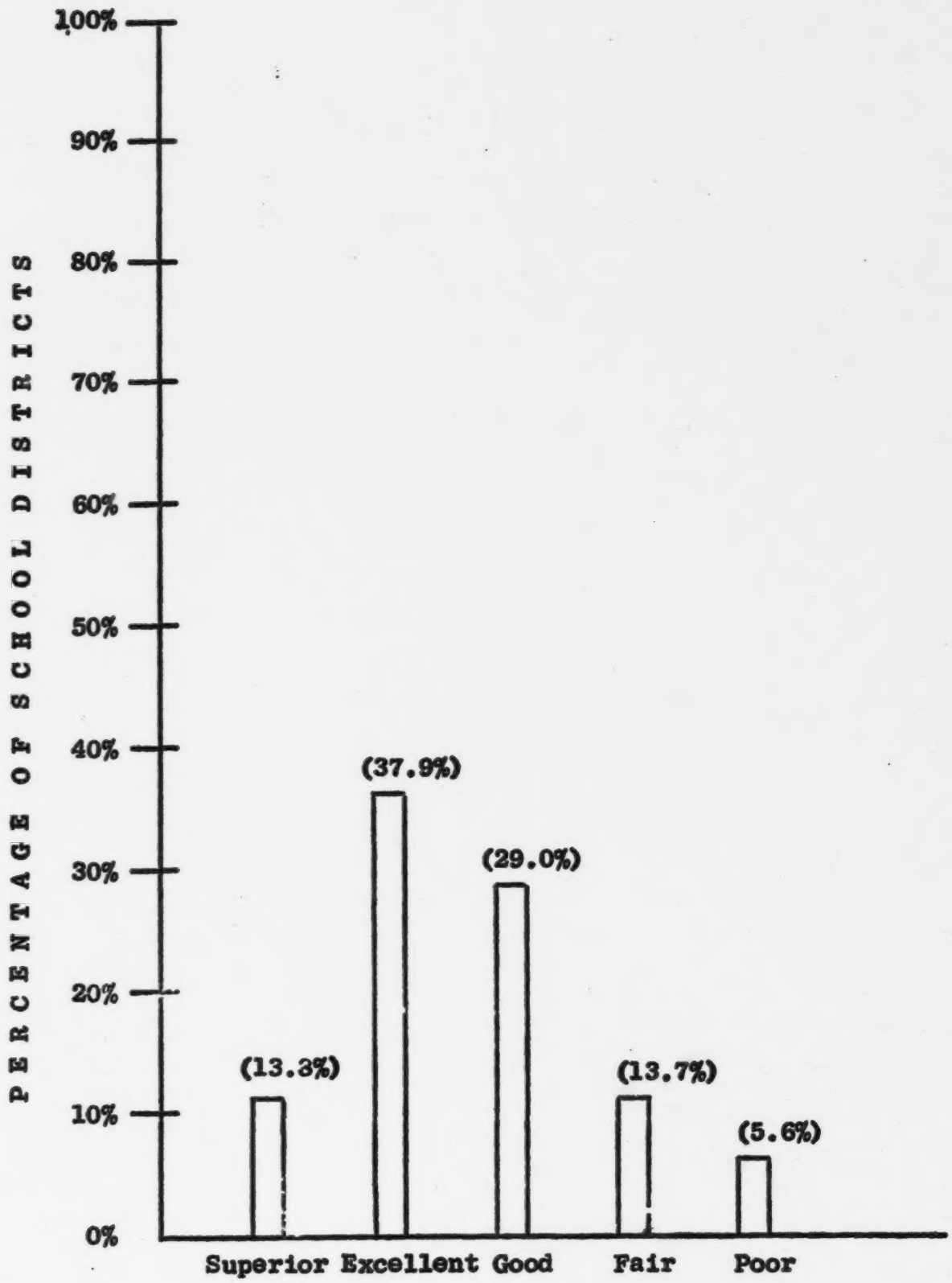


FIGURE 3

EVALUATION OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF LAY ADVISORY COMMITTEES BY CHIEF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS



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